

Spring 2021

Obsessions Semblables: The Creation of Two American Gothic Authors in the French Imagination

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Recommended Citation

Ballard, Isabel, "Obsessions Semblables: The Creation of Two American Gothic Authors in the French Imagination" (2021). *Senior Projects Spring 2021*. 161.
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Obsessions Semblables: The Creation of Two American Gothic Authors in the French
Imagination

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Eric Trudel, for his support, his seemingly paranormal ability to procure PDFs, and all of his invaluable advice. I would also like to thank Marina Van Zuylen for encouraging me to become a French major in the first place. Many thanks to my housemates, Mary, Grayson, Emily and Lia, (and the cat, Ninja) for making my last year at Bard a fun and exciting one despite the global pandemic.

Thanks to my mom, Melissa, for her love and encouragement, and for pushing me to be independent even when I wasn't sure I was ready to be. Thanks to my dad, Wain, for his playfulness and curiosity towards the world—a little of which I hope has rubbed off on me. Thanks to my brother, Julian, for being as steady and supportive as anyone could possibly be, and for always being able to make me laugh.

Last but not least, thanks to Abbie, Adrian, Elizabeth, and Otto for their unrivaled warmth. And thank you to Nate for helping me discover a future beyond Bard.

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INTRODUCTION

The short of it is that Edgar Allan Poe may have just been a seedy, lying alcoholic. The long of it is that “Between Poe’s lies” and his first biographer Rufus Griswold’s “forgeries, it can be difficult to take the measure of Edgar A. Poe. Was the man an utter genius or a complete fraud?”¹ If we are to believe that Poe was simply attempting to market himself and his stories by painting himself as a romantic genius, then perhaps the French who were so obsessed with him simply fell victim to his game. But if we take a broader view of France’s relationship to American literature, this reduced version of the story no longer seems so plausible. The adoption of Poe as an honorary French author is not an isolated incident. Among others, William Faulkner received the same treatment. An article in *The Guardian* from March of 2009 entitled “France’s Strange Love Affair with William Faulkner” makes reference to a poll in which “William Faulkner was the second most-cited author in a French magazine’s poll asking French writers to name their favorite books.”² The author of the article can’t help but ask what makes Faulkner so popular in France. Apparently, “Faulkner would come very low down in a similar British poll,” highlighting the unfathomability of his fame in France for those across the channel.

In an article for *The New Yorker* in 1947, “The American Renaissance in France,” Simone de Beauvoir discusses the lack of discrimination with which French readers devoured American literature in the years between the world wars and following the second world war. The extreme and extended infatuation with anything American during this period led to “a certain amount of fatigue, and even antagonism.”³ This dichotomy seems to describe the perennial relationship between France and the United States. American culture is neither serious enough nor intellectual enough for the French, and yet they are drawn to it despite themselves.

¹ Jill Lepore, “The Humbug: Edgar Allan Poe and the Economy of Horror,” *The New Yorker* (20 April, 2009).

² John Dugdale, “France’s Strange Love Affair with William Faulkner,” *The Guardian* (19 Mar. 2009).

³ Simone de Beauvoir, “An American Renaissance in France,” *The New York Times* (22 June, 1947).

Moreover, American literature, since it is essentially American, must be a cheap pleasure, similar to a Big Mac, and never without a Disney-worthy happy ending. This is an oversimplification of both France and America. However, there is something in this conception which rings true. For, it seems that in order for a French audience to ever fully appreciate a work of American literature, it must be abstracted from its American context, painted as an exception that has been misunderstood by Americans. Only then can it be worthy of the serious attention of the French.

The United States and Europe have long participated in mutual cultural exchange, and the assumption was (and sometimes still is) that European taste takes precedence over its American counterpart. While, as time has gone on, America has developed its own cultural peculiarities and its own literary paradigm, it may still be the case for many American authors that to truly achieve success means to be recognized by European literary critics. This was true, at least from a European perspective, for both Edgar Allan Poe and William Faulkner. The work of both writers was received quite differently in their own country than it was by the French literary public upon being translated. Which is not to say that either writer was better understood in Europe than they were on their own soil. In fact, both authors are considered important parts of the American literary canon, though the attributes for which they are celebrated in America are different from those for which they are celebrated in France. This dichotomy is due to the fact that distinct and complex literary figures were constructed of the two men through the reception of their work in translation and through the act of translation itself. These French-manufactured ideas of Poe and Faulkner play an integral role in the way in which both writers continue to exercise a non-negligible influence on French and American literature.

There are countless articles which discuss the mysterious discrepancy between the way in which Edgar Allan Poe was received in France and the way in which he was received in his own

country. There are articles which argue for the theory that the French better understood his genius; there are those that argue that he was equally well, though differently understood in each country based on a difference in cultural values; and there are those that argue that Poe was entirely misunderstood in France due to a misrepresentation of his work by his translators, namely, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. By contrast, there is no debate surrounding the reception of Faulkner, but there is still an aura of confusion. Why Faulkner? Why France? Spectators of the sort of debate surrounding Poe, or simply of the mystery surrounding the success of Faulkner, might ask whether it is important how an author is perceived, whether there is a correct way to interpret a piece of literature and whether a translation can ever be truly faithful to the original text. While all of these questions are intriguing in their own right, the question which this paper attempts to answer, a sort of culmination of all of the preceding questions, is: how are the figures of authors constructed through the act of translation?

CHAPTER 1: TRANSLATION OR TRANSFUSION?

What we found in the great contemporary American writers was not so much riches of language or even skilled technique, as this authentic sense of the function of literature. The mistake would be to believe that the admiration we have conceived for them ought to deflect us from our own heritage.

—*Simone de Beauvoir (1947)*

The Need for the American Novel

Maurice Edgar Coindreau, Faulkner's primary translator, posits in *William Faulkner in France* that there are moments when "a literature is showing signs of lassitude" and that the importation of a foreign literary influence can have the "invigorating effect" of a "blood transfusion."⁴ While it is difficult to say whether French literature was showing signs of lassitude when either Poe or Faulkner were introduced, Coindreau is correct when it comes to the invigorating effect that these two author's work had on French literature. De Beauvoir, unsatisfied with the binarity between the indiscriminate appreciation and the consequent burgeoning rejection of American literature mentioned earlier, argues that "the American influence has been extremely fruitful."⁵ In fact, she seems to agree with Coindreau that French literature was hitting a dead-end when she states that it "had become a purely abstract domain; nothing could be integrated with it that had not first been reduced to concepts by analysis or poetry."⁶ The question then, is: what is it that made the French so receptive to these two American authors? What is it about these two authors that made them appropriate literary blood donors—to continue the metaphor—for France at this moment in time? De Beauvoir would say that American literature brought a "throbbing," "living language" capable of expressing human experience "nakedly."⁷

⁴ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "William Faulkner in France," (*Yale French Studies*, 2021) p. 85.

⁵ de Beauvoir, "An American Renaissance in France."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Beneath the more romantic idea of a cultural exchange between France and America, lies a complicated economy of ideas. Simone de Beauvoir ends her article with an obvious nod to this idea of exchange. She begins, “French culture is strong enough not to fear what comes to it from the outside”—already asserting the control of the French over the forces of foreign literary influence—going on to argue that it is “perhaps only by such exposure” to foreign influence that French literature will be able “to aid American literature in that transcendence of itself which every literature must achieve.”⁸ Implicit in this idea of “exchange” is the call for the absorption of American ideas, the desire to assimilate certain American ideas into French literature. As we shall see, the French have woven a complicated web of rationalizations that make this appropriation of American literature possible. In his préface to the first French edition of William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*—the first novel of Faulkner’s to be translated into French (1933)—André Malraux captures how both Faulkner and Poe have come to be conceived of in the French imagination.

Un tel monde fut longtemps matière de conte ; même si les échos américains ne nous répétaient complaisamment que l’alcool fait partie de la légende personnelle de M. Faulkner, le rapport entre son univers et celui d’Edgar Poe ou d’Hoffmann serait évident. Matériel psychanalytique semblable, haines, chevaux, cercueils, obsessions semblables. Ce qui sépare Faulkner de Poe, c’est la notion qu’ils ont l’un et l’autre de l’œuvre d’art ; plus exactement, c’est que l’œuvre d’art existait pour Poe, et primait la volonté d’expression — sans doute est-ce là ce qui provisoirement l’écarte le plus de nous. Il créait *des objets*. Le

⁸ Ibid.

conte, terminé, prenait pour lui l'existence indépendante et limitée du tableau de chevalet.⁹

We shall see later how even a small detail like the alcoholism of Faulkner or Poe will serve the French is creating out of both men myths of the outcast or misunderstood genius. Furthermore, what Malraux points to as each author's conception of "l'œuvre d'art," is drawn not from the authors themselves but from their French critics and translators. The images that the French have constructed of Faulkner and Poe have allowed them to de-americanize both men and to instead reappropriate them as honorary French writers. Especially in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, who was translated and revered by three generations of prolific French poets, this co-opted figure has become deeply embedded in the French imagination and the line between his ideas and the ideas of these poets has become difficult to parse.

The Many Faces of Translation

The figure of Edgar Allan Poe that was created through the translation of his work and ideas into French is multifaceted. His incarnations are as diverse as the French writers and critics who have written about him—multiple Poes may even exist in the mind and work of any given reader.¹⁰ Henri Justin, a prolific French Poe scholar, brings up the example of André Breton who seemed to vacillate between an intense admiration of Poe and a similarly intense disdain. The first example that Justin gives of Breton's view of Poe is the line in the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* which states, in Justin's translation, "Poe is surrealist in adventure..." an interpretation that is in line with that of Baudelaire or even Jules Verne.¹¹ However, in Breton's

⁹André Malraux, "Préface," *Sanctuaire* by William Faulkner (Gallimard, 1972) p. 8.

¹⁰Henri Justin, "The Paradoxes of Poe's Reception in France," *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* (Penn State University, 2010) p. 88.

¹¹ Idem, p. 79.

Second Manifesto, written in 1929, Poe is compared to a policeman for, in Justin's words, being a writer "who insisted on control and textual composition" and also for being the father of the "scientific policemen," in other words, the detective genre.¹² This second interpretation of Poe was most likely drawn from the writing of Paul Valéry on Poe's "Philosophy of Composition." Such an example reflects the way in which Poe is at once imagined to be an author of free flowing adventure and an orderly author of very intentionally structured poems. The Poe which Breton perceives at any given moment is more heavily influenced by the state of his own art and his relationship to the ideas of Poe's translators than by the work of Edgar Allan Poe itself.

Poe is simultaneously whimsical and grotesque, a writer of cheap tales and a master of pure poetry; Poe is (at least perceived to be) a paradox. The inconsistency of the idea of Poe for Breton is illustrated again in his *Anthology of Black Humor*, in which his opinion changes once more as he exalts Poe, "cet amant du hasard," this time drawing from Mallarmé.¹³ What must be interrogated is the origin of the paradoxical Poe. Is there some quality inherent in the work of Edgar Allan Poe that creates this contradictory figure in the minds of his readers? Or did these contradictions arise from the varied interpretations of Poe's work by his most famous French admirers? While Justin believes that Poe is inherently paradoxical, it is more appropriate to say that this neurosis of interpretation can be traced to the very different ideas of Poe created respectively by Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry. Each chose a different facet of Poe's writing to focus on and thus each magnified this chosen facet to create a figure of diverse and contradictory genius.

¹² *Idem*, p. 80

¹³ *Ibid.* ("Cet amant du hasard" may be a reference to Mallarmé's *Igitur*, which features ideas about the role of "le hasard" in artistic creation and the possibility of eliminating "le hasard." It may also be a reference to Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, where similar themes reappear. Whatever it may be, this conception of Poe does not seem to be tied to anything concrete in Poe's work but rather to the discourse of his critics and translators.)

Similarly, various Faulkners are revealed through the handful of introductions written by famous French authors for the French translations of his work. Sapiro, in “Faulkner in France,” tells us that these introductions served two purposes. First, they serve as a “transfer of symbolic capital,”¹⁴ bestowing the legitimacy of a well known author, such as Valery Larbaud or Albert Camus,¹⁵ onto an unknown author. Additionally, the prefaces were published in *La Nouvelle revue française* before the official publication of the book by Gallimard in order to create anticipation for the novel. Second, these introductions provide an interpretation of the work, laying out the main themes of the novels and thereby making it easier for a French reader to understand and engage with the work.¹⁶ Especially in the case of a little known and difficult writer like Faulkner, these introductions were indispensable to the process of establishing his literary reputation in France. The result of these various introductions is the creation of a number of detailed portraits of Faulkner as a literary figure. Among the most famous is Malraux’s introduction which paints Faulkner—as we shall see later on—as at once a tragedian and the weaver of complicated webs of intrigue.

One of the parallels drawn by Malraux between Poe and Faulkner is of course their shared focus on the psychological. Perhaps it is this quality which appeals so particularly to French critics, but perhaps also the psychological is of interest to Malraux and other French critics and is consequently what they would like to see. This psychological element may have acted more as a mirror, showing the reader to himself, than a window through which one could discern any trait of the author. It is by virtue of this self-reflective reading that the idea of Faulkner as a writer of the modern Greek tragedy emerged in France where the classics have a much firmer hold on the collective imagination. Additionally, the ideas emerging during the time

¹⁴ Gisèle Sapiro, “Faulkner in France,” (*Journal of World Literature*, 2016) p. 399.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

that Faulkner was translated into French, and which later led to the existentialist and absurdist movements, influenced and reflected the ideas which French critics highlighted in their interpretations of Faulkner. As Peter Lurie points out in “The French Faulkner,” this *écart* between the American and the French ideas of Faulkner is also due to the French reader’s “beneficial distance” from the subjects of American literature which allows them to see the work of these authors differently if not more clearly.¹⁷

Malraux also creates a very important distinction between the two authors. He states, as noted earlier, that “Ce qui sépare Faulkner de Poe, c’est la notion qu’ils ont l’un et l’autre de l’œuvre d’art.” According to Malraux, Poe believed in the oeuvre—a collective idea of the work of an artist—whereas Faulkner did not. Poe considered himself to be creating art objects, a notion which was very important to Valéry and to Mallarmé, each in their own way. By contrast, Malraux believes that Faulkner did not think of his work as a stagnant, perfectible object but rather as a living and adaptable thing that would go on changing after publication. Coindreau famously quotes him as stating “After a novelist has finished a book and given it to the public, there’s only one thing left for him to do—start another one. The preceding one is no longer his.”¹⁸ While it could be said that this difference merely reveals a changing conception of art due to the passage of time, this distinction is one of the traits that aligned each author with the state of French literature at the time of their respective translations; one characteristic which made them appropriate donors of a literary “blood transfusion.”

The American Gothic

¹⁷ Peter Lurie, “The French Faulkner: Visibility, Absence, and Sanctuary’s ‘Lake of Ink’” (*University of Richmond English Faculty Publications*, 2007) p. 51.

¹⁸ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, “The Faulkner I Knew,” *The Time of William Faulkner: A French View of Modern American Fiction* (University of South Carolina Press, 1971) p. 99.

There is, as well, a concrete literary classification which connects Poe and Faulkner in the American literary tradition: both are preeminent figures of the American Gothic, a classification which includes writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Toni Morrison. As a genre, the American Gothic, like film noir,¹⁹ has been exalted in France even when it has not always been celebrated to the same degree in America. This difference in taste may be due to the French displaying a greater acceptance of the grotesque in art but also because of the distance of the French from the subjects of such work (often dealing with contentious social issues). Additionally, the puritanical streak of many Americans gives a different character to this sort of gruesome work, finding fault, sin and shame in places where it may not even occur to French readers to look for them. Many of the protestations surrounding the translation of both Faulkner and Poe into French were based on the idea that neither author wrote works which would paint a flattering picture of America for foreign audiences. Of course, the American Gothic—as a genre which is often used to critique American society through horror as analogy—has its ghosts. Where Poe’s ghosts are often literally present, Faulkner evokes a more metaphorical ghost in his work. Like two sides of the same coin, Poe and Faulkner represent two sides (and two times) of the American Gothic. Interestingly, the ghosts of the American Gothic seem reluctant to stay confined to the page. In fact, the French reception of both authors itself can be said to be haunted. In this case the ghost in question is the spectre of the modern novel, specifically Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*.

Before explicating in detail the ghost of *Madame Bovary*, the American Gothic itself is a term worth defining. Teresa Goddu, in her “Introduction to American Gothic,” points out that unlike the gothic period in English literature, the American Gothic does not refer to a bookended moment. Rather, it points to a genre which emerged along with the American novel and which

¹⁹ Lurie, “The French Faulkner,” p. 51.

resists a historical reading.²⁰ This ahistorical quality is partially due to the fact that there is no moment that we can point to as the founding of the gothic in America. American authors, since the Gothic movement in Britain, have incorporated elements of the Gothic and adapted them to fit the American subject. The resulting genre is often regionally defined instead of temporally defined, being strongly associated with the South, “the nation’s ‘other’.”²¹ However, no satisfying classification of the American Gothic has been agreed upon and the limits of the genre continue to be challenged and expanded. Thus, much of the Gothic in American literature has been defined negatively, by what it is not, rather than by some list of positively identifiable attributes. In the words of Goddu, it is a genre comprising “everything from which the nation wants to dissociate itself.”²² Unlike the British Gothic which is defined by a set of literary conventions, the American Gothic “depends less on the particular set of conventions it establishes than on those it disrupts.”²³

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the American Gothic is that it is “haunted by race,” a distinctly American spectre.²⁴ In the American context, the metaphor of “darkness,” which permeates the critical discourse surrounding American Gothic texts, cannot be completely dissociated from race and the idea of blackness. If there is any specific period of time which can be said to characterize the Southern Gothic (a term used both to denote a subset of the American Gothic and, by some, interchangeably with the American Gothic) then it is the century after the Civil War in the American South. Faulkner makes very clear the haunted quality of this place and time through the mouthpiece of Mr. Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!* who states:

“Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies

²⁰ Teresa Goddu, “Introduction to American Gothic,” *The Horror Reader*, edited by Ken Gelder (Routledge, 2000). p. 269.

²¹ *Idem*, p. 265.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Idem*, p. 266.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 269.

into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?"²⁵ While the broader genre of the American Gothic originated before the American civil war, it may mark the shift in American Gothic writing from literal ghosts to metaphorical ghosts. The ghosts of Poe are of a more traditional variety, belonging to the former category. Still, behind their horrific facades, one can find traces of social commentary, in this case pertaining to the unique and nascent issues which plague the modern man.²⁶

The Spectre of Emma Bovary

Now to return to the issue of *Madame Bovary*. Though it is significant that *Sanctuary* has, on multiple occasions, been compared to *Madame Bovary*,²⁷ the two novels are interlinked more intimately than this. In fact, Faulkner makes explicit allusion in *Sanctuary* to "that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth,"²⁸ in reference to the bile which Emma Bovary vomits up in her death throes, an episode open to multiple interpretations. Faulkner uses this horrific image to describe the smell of Popeye, the most explicitly villainous character of the novel. This reference shows not only the influence of French modern literature on Faulkner's work (Faulkner makes multiple nods to modernist literature such as a "Lake Rimbaud" which appears in *Pylon*²⁹), but the ways in which *Madame Bovary* has come to define what the modern novel is.³⁰ In the words of Baudelaire, *Madame Bovary* is carried by "l'analyse et la logique" and proves that "tous les

²⁵ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Vintage International, 1990) p. 7-8.

²⁶ Baudelaire's writing on Poe may give the best explanation of how Poe's writing relates to the issues presented by urbanization and modernization. In a story like "Man of the Crowd," Poe explores themes very similar to those of Baudelaire. The unique feeling of anonymity that comes from being lost in a city crowd, the ability to observe without consequence, and the incredible, dizzying speed at which things move in an urban environment are all present in this story. In "Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe," Baudelaire recognized Poe as a uniquely urban writer, interpolating from his work the idea that "le progrès perfectionne la douleur," a distinct criticism of the "progrès incessant" which had become the heart of the modern world. (Charles Baudelaire, *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe* (A. Quentin, 1884) p. 10-11.)

²⁷ Lurie, "The French Faulkner," p. 52.

²⁸ William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (Random House, 1931) p. 7.

²⁹ Lurie, "The French Faulkner," p. 57.

³⁰ *Idem*, p. 52.

sujets, sont indifféremment bons ou mauvais, selon la manière dont ils sont traités, et que les plus vulgaires peuvent devenir les meilleurs.”³¹ What Baudelaire sees in *Madame Bovary* echoes his own philosophy of what real art does, elevating the repulsive to the realm of the beautiful. According to Baudelaire, “un artiste n’est un artiste que grâce à son sens exquis du beau, — sens qui lui procure des jouissances enivrantes, mais qui en même temps implique, enferme un sens également exquis de toute difformité et de toute disproportion.”³² Emma Bovary, the adulterous woman, is the perfect example of the convoluted relationship between the repulsive and the beautiful, being physically admirable but morally reprehensible. Through the character of Emma Bovary, Flaubert shows that beauty can be amoral and thus won the respect of Baudelaire, who believed the same.

Madame Bovary was published in the same year as Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), nearly thirty years into Baudelaire’s time as Poe’s translator. In an essay published in *L’Artiste* in October 1857, Baudelaire seeks to indicate “quelques points de vue oubliés” by previous critics.³³ In the opinion of Baudelaire, Flaubert was able to accomplish something that many authors before him had tried but failed to do. Flaubert successfully broke from romanticism and achieved “du premier coup ce que d’autres cherchent toute leur vie.”³⁴ It is significant that what Baudelaire praises in *Madame Bovary* is Flaubert’s ability to create a character as vibrant as Emma Bovary. Baudelaire sees her as a “virile” figure, a man’s mind cloaked in a female body. He praises her imagination and her desire to dominate, but most of all, for Baudelaire, Emma Bovary embodies the artistic spirit because “elle poursuit l’Idéal!”³⁵ Thus both the idea of the modern artist and of the modern novel can be traced back to *Madame*

³¹ Charles Baudelaire, “Madame Bovary par Gustave Flaubert,” *Œuvres Complètes*, (Gallimard, 1961) p. 652.

³² Baudelaire, *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*, p. 19-20.

³³ Baudelaire, “Madame Bovary par Gustave Flaubert,” p. 647.

³⁴ *Idem*, p. 250.

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 655.

Bovary. However, where Faulkner's work is haunted by *Madame Bovary* because it had an influence on Faulkner himself, the ghost of *Bovary* that haunts Poe's reception in France is entirely due to Baudelaire, as the novel was published after Poe's death.

This spectre of *Madame Bovary*, at once a product of French reception of American work and of French literary influence on American work, points to the cultural exchange between the two countries. Both Poe and Faulkner were heavily influenced by French literature, and more broadly by the established European literary canon. Both authors were also influential to European literature. However, the exchange does not take place on equal ground. America—as a former colony and with a population largely descended from European ancestors—reads European literature as the literature of the old world, the world from which it was born, an authoritative source. By contrast, European reception of American literature often takes the form of a reclamation. European critics recognize the European influence in a work of American literature and can therefore paint the translation of the American work as a kind of re-naturalizing of European ideas. In other words, a reappropriation of the American as European, a sort of intellectual neo-colonialism. This kind of re-naturalizing rhetoric takes on a very specific character in the French context.

The most prominent way in which Faulkner and Poe have been (re)appropriated into the French canon is through the portrayal of both writers as *poètes maudits*. What it means to be a *poète maudit* is not completely clear, but the idea behind it has become so incorporated into the French literary culture that it is often implicitly referenced and its validity left unquestioned. The term became popular thanks to Paul Verlaine's critical piece titled *Les Poètes maudits*, in which he makes explicit reference to Mallarmé's poem *Tombeau d'Edgar Poe* and to his translations of Poe's works.³⁶ Solène Thomas postulates that the term *poète maudit* most likely originated with

³⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Notes et Variantes," *Œuvres complètes*. (Gallimard, 1945) p. 1523.

Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*.³⁷ The term, in the words of Thomas, refers to “celui qui, ne s'étant pas compromis dans des stratégies publicitaires et dédaignant le succès, ne rencontre pas la gloire qu'il mériterait.”³⁸ For Verlaine, and more importantly for Baudelaire, the *poète maudit* was, as Thomas summarizes, “le vrai poète... le sublime.”³⁹ But Thomas shows that what is interesting, specifically in Verlaine's usage of the term, is the way in which “l'estampille «maudit» va... servir d'argument publicitaire,” bringing the unknown or underappreciated writer into the limelight.⁴⁰ By claiming that both Faulkner and Poe were so deeply misunderstood in America, Baudelaire and Coindreau bestowed the mythos of the *poète maudit*—though never directly acknowledged as such—on their American counterparts. By doing this, the French reading public was challenged to understand Poe and Faulkner, to find genius where Americans had not.

³⁷ Francis F. Bruch, “Paul Verlaine's Les Poètes Maudits: The Dating of the Essays and Origin of the Title,” *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 76, no. 8 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961) p. 754.

³⁸ Solène Thomas, “Ce que *maudit* veut dire,” *Revue Verlaine*, no. 12 (Classiques Garnier, 2014) p. 283.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2: *INANITÉS SONORES*

The “real” Poe (to take an invidious adjective from the titles of a modern kind biography) is a simple, intelligible, and if one may dare to say it, a rather insignificant man. To make a hero or villain of him is to write fiction.

—John Macy (1908)

A Question of Translation

This paper will make no claim as to what is good or bad translation, but rather will evaluate the metamorphic effects of translation on a text. There are many questions posed by the task of translation that have no correct answers. For example, one question which arises in the translation of Faulkner’s works is that of how to translate the vernacular speech of many of his characters. One option would be to try to graph the social implications of a given way of speaking onto its equivalent in the target language culture. This option would not only change the original interpretation of the character, but is also politically precarious when considering the socio-economic dynamics which would need to be evaluated in order to find an “equivalent” to, say, a black character, living in the Southern United States, who carries the distinct heritage of slavery and the deeply embedded racial prejudice of the South. Another way that a translator may choose to deal with a culturally and linguistically specific form of speech is to ignore it. In this case there is no effort made to find an analogous vernacular between cultures but this comes at a significant detriment to the original text. Other issues arise when considering the original style of the text. This is especially apparent in the case of translations of poems which may or may not rhyme and in which a choice may need to be made between preserving meter or preserving meaning.

One of the most striking examples of a translation which employed a very different style to its source text, thus altering the reception of the work in the target language, is the translation of Dotoyevsky from Russian into French. For the sake of easy comparison, Jean-Louis Backès

looked at various translations of Dostoyevsky's famous novel, *The Idiot*.⁴¹ The best known French translation of *The Idiot* was originally that by Albert Mousset.⁴² This translation was the only version available in French from 1930 until 1977, when Pierre Pascal retranslated the novel. This is especially significant due to the style of Mousset's translation. The original work of Dostoyevsky in Russian has a disjointed rhythm and is written in Russian vernacular rather than formal literary Russian. Mousset's translation does not accurately convey the style of the original Russian novel at all.⁴³ Instead, Mousset chose to beautify the language of the work and the resulting translation reads something like a novel by Flaubert, which was the prevailing aesthetic preference in France at the time. Pascal and later André Marckowicz (*The idiot*, 1993), attempted to rectify this mistake and retranslate Dostoevsky in such a way that the original disconcerting and confusing feeling of the narrative style would come through.

During the period between 1930 and 1977, however, the French population who did not also speak Russian or German (a language into which Dostoevsky was adeptly translated), had only the translation of Mousset on which to base their opinions of the work of Dostoevsky. In fact, the smoothed-over translations of Mousset had a lot of success in France, elevating Dostoevsky to the level of great French authors.⁴⁴ Now, this is not to say that Dostoevsky does not deserve to be lauded as a great writer, but rather that the reasons for which he was celebrated in France were at least in half manufactured by Albert Mousset and could not truly be attributed to Dostoevsky. This example is an extreme one, but there is something similar though much subtler at play in the translation and subsequent reception of both Poe and Faulkner in France. Faulkner, more than Poe, presented a challenge to translators due to his loose, ungrammatical

⁴¹ Jean-Louis Backès, "Traduire Dostoïevski," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Juin, 2001) p. 145.

⁴² *Idem*, p. 151.

⁴³ *Idem*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, p. 149.

style and the use of various forms of American vernacular English. Though to a lesser degree than Faulkner's, Poe's work also presented challenges and carried with it culturally specific meanings which often undergo a sort of transmutation in translation.

Poe's reception in America

In order to effectively contrast the reception of Poe in France with the one his works received in America, the problem of Poe's reputation in the American press after his death must be examined. What Scott Peeples shows to be the curious thing about Poe's "afterlife," is that the first widely accepted biography of Poe was written by Rufus Griswold. Griswold was a literary rival of Poe's and his brief account of Poe's life is "largely erroneous" and is followed by "a general character assassination, describing Poe as dishonest, choleric, conceited, crudely ambitious, and cynical."⁴⁵ While the mythos that grew up around Poe painted him as a man with few friends due to his incapacity for sympathy towards others, he did in fact have friends and admirers. A few of these friends attempted to defend him from Griswold's negative account.⁴⁶ However, Griswold managed to secure himself the place of being Poe's literary executor, legitimizing his role as Poe's biographer in the eyes of the public. It is unclear whether Poe truly wished for Griswold to hold this position, though Griswold claimed that Poe had left a letter authorizing Griswold to compile and publish his remaining work after his death.⁴⁷ Whether he wished it or not, Poe's obituary and his works were placed in the hands of a man who hated him. Peeples points out that there is some evidence to suggest that Poe may have known that the negative press generated by Griswold's "defamatory description" would increase the public's interest in his work—any publicity is good publicity.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Scott Peeples, "The Man That Was Used Up: Poe's Place in American Literature, 1849-1909," *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Boydell & Brewer: Camden House, 2003) p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Idem, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Indeed, in much the same way that the idea of the *poète maudit* is a publicity tool, the controversy over Poe's character which was ignited by Griswold "kept people writing about Poe for decades."⁴⁹ Peeples further complicates the mythologizing of Poe by revealing that the description of Poe in the obituary written by Griswold was in fact quoted from the novel *The Caxtons* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton.⁵⁰ The quotation was placed in quotation marks in the obituary, but later in Griswold's memoir of Poe's life, the quotation marks were removed. Thus, the man the public knew as "Poe, just two days after his death, was already a fiction."⁵¹ Since Griswold, there have been many biographies of Poe, some of which whitewash him and others as contemptuous as Griswold's, but all of which contribute to the "unusually intense" mythologizing of Poe.⁵² There are two, however, which Peeples believes to give a fair account of Poe's life, respectively authored by John Henry Ingram (1880) and George Woodberry (1885).⁵³ Though these two works had a more credible evidential basis, they contributed to, rather than subtracted from, the obfuscation and fictionalization of Poe by creating a desire to discover the "real" Poe.⁵⁴

Finally, Peeples points out that there are some scholars who believe that the American rejection of Poe was due largely to his being Southern, rather than to any negative account given of his character.⁵⁵ As an important influential figure of the American Gothic as it is understood today, Poe's Southernness and thus his rejection by a primarily Northern literary establishment,

⁴⁹ Peeples, "The Man that Was Used Up," p. 5.

⁵⁰ The original quotation in *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*, a Victorian novel published in 1849, is a part of the description of the character Francis Vivian by the narrator of the novel. The quotation reads as follows: "Irascible, arrogant—bad enough, but not the worst, for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold repellent cynicism, his passions vented themselves into sneers" (Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (W. Blackwood, 1849. *Internet Archive*) p. 62). In his version, Griswold left out the word "arrogant" but otherwise quoted the novel directly. (Peeples, p. 5).

⁵¹ *Idem*, p. 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Idem*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Idem*, p. 12-14.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, p. 22.

reinforces a popular narrative of the rejected, misfit, Southern Gothic author. Though Poe uses few Southern settings and there is arguably nothing particularly Southern about his work, there are still many people who read an unmistakable Southern character into Edgar Allan Poe.⁵⁶ The Southern character which is perceived in Poe's work comprises much of what is now condemned as racist and sexist in Poe's writing.⁵⁷ For, much of the time, what is seen as distinctly Southern in an author's work (at least from the standpoint of the literary establishment heavily rooted in the Northeastern United States) seems to be a pervasive sense of "white male supremacy."⁵⁸ In a similar fashion, the fame that Poe found abroad was due in large part to an embrace of characteristics that were summarily rejected by an American audience. For instance, the French poet Charles Baudelaire celebrated and romanticized Poe's drunkenness and coarse personality as marks of a tortured genius.⁵⁹

The debate about the truth of Poe's character is further confounded by the fact that Poe was notorious for embellishing the truth. In an insightful article published in *The New Yorker* in April of 2009, Jill Lepore reminds us that much of what Poe wrote was written simply "to stave

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Maybe one of the most famous examples of (possible) covert racism in Poe comes at the conclusion of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." This story, by and large regarded as the first example of the detective story, follows a Sherlock Holmes type investigator who has an innate gift for "analysis," named Dupin (141). What Dupin concludes after investigating the scene of the mysterious and brutal murders of two women, is that the murderer was not, in fact, a man but an Orangutan (Orang-Outang in the text). Though not the only possible interpretation, one reading of the subtext of this story is that Poe wrote the Orangutan as a euphemism for an African man. The assumption—or rather the portrayal—of black men as inherent threats to the virtue and safety of white women is a prominent theme across American literature and media. This interpretation is often supported by descriptions of the ape in the text that align with stereotypically racist descriptions of black people by white Westerners. These descriptions range from descriptions of the "peculiar voice" of the Orangutan—Dupin explicitly concedes that the voice "might have been the voice of an Asiatic or an African," accents which would be sufficiently foreign to a diverse array of Europeans to cause immense confusion over the language spoken—to its "inhuman hair" which some take to be an allusion to afro-textured hair (168). Furthermore, the orangutan is portrayed as being "of great value" and having been obtained in Africa and brought to Europe by a Maltese sailor, it is not difficult to see how one might conclude that Poe is alluding to the transatlantic slave trade. While this is not a definitive instance of racism, it does give an example of how, through a specific lens, one might easily draw negative conclusions regarding Poe's politics. I will make no argument one way or the other in this paper. (Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays, and Reviews* (Penguin, 2003) pp. 141-176.)

⁵⁸ Peebles, "The Man That Was Used Up," p. 21.

⁵⁹ Idem, p. 9.

off starvation.”⁶⁰ She argues that nearly everything that Poe wrote was “a contrivance,” from the poem “The Raven” which she quotes Poe in a letter to a friend as saying “had a great run” because he “wrote it for the express purpose of running,”⁶¹ to “The Philosophy of Composition” in which Poe claims to have written “The Raven” backwards, which he didn’t do. Poe did not write to serve some higher artistic purpose, but rather because he was poor and unable to hold down any other type of job. Lepore shows how Poe considered himself to be more intelligent than his audience. His attitude may be best summarized by the character of Dupin, amateur sleuth and Sherlock Holmes predecessor, a formerly wealthy man reduced to poverty who could see into other men’s souls with an inhuman degree of *acumen*. This character, with which Poe identified strongly, was unsubtly named *Dup[e]-in*. To his credit, Poe—who was himself an astute and often cruel literary critic—did manage to deduce what types of stories would sell well. Like Nabokov or Kierkegaard, Poe seems to have been acutely aware of the literary establishment’s tendency to mythologize authors and attempted to take advantage of this, rather than fall victim to it, by preemptively creating a literary persona for himself.

Charles Baudelaire was the first important translator of Poe’s work into French and, as such, brought Poe into the French consciousness. Baudelaire was enraptured by Poe’s tales and admired Poe greatly, even though he never met him in person. He spent nearly a decade translating various works by Poe and writing his own critical analysis of Poe’s oeuvre. While Baudelaire’s translation work was for the most part motivated by his great affinity to Poe—both being literary underdogs in similar financial straits—his translations of Poe’s stories are one of the main ways that Baudelaire was able to keep himself afloat while indulging in an excessive lifestyle and cultivating his own poetic discipline. The first story that Baudelaire translated of

⁶⁰ Lepore, “The Humbug.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Poe's was published in *La Liberté de penser* in 1848. The story he chose was the 1845 work originally titled "Mesmeric Revelation."⁶² Baudelaire continued to publish translations of various tales through 1855. Then, in 1856 Baudelaire's first collection of Poe's tales was published with the title *Histoires extraordinaires*. The following year, Baudelaire published his second collection of translations, entitled *Nouvelles histoires extradordinaires*.⁶³

The Baudelairian Poe

For Baudelaire, "Mesmeric Revelation" seeks to answer the question: "ne pourrait-on pas, à l'aide de la force inconnue dite fluide magnétique, découvrir la loi qui régit les mondes ultérieurs ?" It can be assumed that this story was, for Baudelaire, an example of some of the integral themes in Poe's writing. Baudelaire saw in Poe's work a reflection of his own interests. Thus, from this choice of story we can draw some conclusions about Baudelaire's aesthetic preferences when it comes to Poe's work. He often favored the stories which dealt in death and the afterlife, those which challenged the reader's perception of reality, and those which dealt with the idea of perversity. These are all strong themes in Baudelaire's own writing, but make up only a fraction of Poe's oeuvre. Though in many ways Poe's work was an already existing example of what Baudelaire sought to create, it also falls short of Baudelaire's ideal. It could be said that Baudelaire saw in Poe's work the beginnings of a certain genre of writing, but something that was not yet fully formed. So, Poe's artistic goal—or what Baudelaire perceived it to be—matched up with Baudelaire's artistic goal, leading Baudelaire to feel a deep connection with Poe.

The two collections of Poe's stories that Baudelaire published are worthy of deeper consideration for a few reasons. First, Baudelaire did not translate and republish an existing

⁶² Charles Baudelaire, *Edgar Allan Poe* (L'Herne, 2011).

⁶³ *Baudelaire as a Translator – Purple Ink* (Brown University, 2017).

collection of Poe's work. Rather, he curated the selection himself. Second, Baudelaire chose not to translate nearly a third of Poe's stories, opting, rather, to translate only those that he found to best represent Poe's genius.⁶⁴ Baudelaire, when asked why he separated Poe's tales into *Histoires extraordinaires* and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, explained that "Le premier volume est fait pour amorcer le public : jongleries, conjecturisme, canards, etc." where "le second volume est d'un fantastique plus relevé : hallucinations, maladies mentales, grotesque pur, surnaturalisme, etc."⁶⁵ Henri Justin points out that the organizational choices that Baudelaire made when publishing his translations of Poe were not insignificant. His choice to translate or to not translate certain stories—along with the way he grouped them—served to influence the way that Poe came to be imagined in the French consciousness.

Furthermore, the two collections are separated to some extent by genre. Baudelaire's separation of his translations into two thematically distinct collections of stories is the root of the first fractioning in the figure of Edgar Allan Poe in the French imagination. The two collections show two different sides of Poe. *Histoires extraordinaires*, containing "Double assassinat dans la rue Morgue," "La lettre volée," "Le scarabée d'or," "Aventure sans pareille d'un certain Hans Pfaall," "La vérité sur le cas de M. Valdemar" and "Révélation magnétique," among other works, is largely composed of works of science fiction or precursors to the detective genre. In fact, *Histoires extraordinaires* served as a major influence for Jules Verne. The only piece of analytic criticism that Verne ever wrote was concerned with the *Histoires extraordinaires*, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, and Baudelaire's translation of *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1858).⁶⁶ However, Verne spends nearly all of the article analyzing the first collection of tales

⁶⁴ Justin, "The Paradoxes of Poe's Reception in France," p. 81-82.

⁶⁵ Charles Baudelaire, "À Sainte-Beuve, Mercredi 26 Mars, 1856," *Lettres : 1841-1866 / Charles Baudelaire* (Editions de Mercure, 1906) p. 92. [emphasis in the original]

⁶⁶ Justin, "The Paradoxes of Poe's Reception in France," p. 82-83.

and concludes with a chapter on *Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym*, devoting only a few lines to each of the stories in *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*. For Jules Verne, the Poe that came to life was this first, more whimsical figure, rather than the darker, gothic figure that comes forth in the second collection of tales.

Not only did Baudelaire's translation of Poe's tales serve to forge a persistent image of Poe in the French imagination as a tortured genius, but Baudelaire's idea of Poe was assimilated into his own work and his own literary persona. While the specifics of Baudelaire's translation of Poe will be discussed later, there are a few linguistic particularities that will serve well to demonstrate how Baudelaire's Poe became a part of Baudelaire's Baudelaire. In her essay "Writing Foreign," Ineke Wallaert performs a close analysis of Baudelaire's translation. She focuses on the way that he handles certain neologisms in Poe's stories and how his own neologisms—created in the act of translation—permeate his later work. In fact, Wallaert goes so far as to claim that the affinity that Baudelaire felt to Poe was also forged in the act of translation. That the Poe that Baudelaire saw was one that he had, in fact, created. Though he did find out that the alcoholism, drug abuse, and antisocial character of Poe has been shown to be a fiction, Baudelaire continued to perpetuate this image of Poe because it matched up with his own conception of the tragic artist.⁶⁷ As a product of his own imagination and in some ways as a sort of muse, this baudelairian Edgar Allan Poe became an integral part of the literary figure of Baudelaire.⁶⁸

Poe was a prolific inventor of new words, creating challenging work for his translators and inspiring a similar practice in the work of translation. There are around nine hundred and fifty-four words throughout Poe's stories which he invented and most of which are not in the

⁶⁷ Ineke Wallaert, "Writing Foreign: The Paradoxes of Baudelaire's Neologizing Strategies in His Translations of Poe," *Palimpsestes. Revue de traduction* (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, Oct. 2012) p.70.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p.72-73.

Oxford English dictionary.⁶⁹ Included among these are words such as “bemystified,” “didacticism,” and “enjeweled.”⁷⁰ An example of Baudelaire’s translation of one such neologism is in the case of the word “all metaphysicianism” in “The Imp of the Perverse” which became “une bonne partie des sciences métaphysiques.”⁷¹ In this case Baudelaire avoided the problem of the neologism. However, there are also instances in which Baudelaire creates his own neologisms in order to contend with what he perceived to be untranslatable. One such case occurs in “Révélation magnétique,” where Baudelaire translates the word “unincorporate” as “incorporellement.”⁷² More significantly, there are also cases in which Baudelaire *adds* a neologism where there is no similar word in the original text. Poe uses the phrase “the gulf beyond” in his story “The Pit and the Pendulum” which Baudelaire translated as “gouffre transmondain.” “Transmondain” is a unique baudelairian neologism which does not correlate to the English original and could have been avoided by using instead the phrase “gouffre de l’au-delà.”⁷³ Thus, in his translation of Poe, Baudelaire adopts some of the stylistic techniques of the American author to an extent beyond that minimally required to effectively translate his works.

Perhaps it is self-evident that Baudelaire’s version of Poe’s tales read differently than the originals in English. On the one hand, the work of Edgar Allan Poe is often criticized for reading like exactly what Lepore argues it is, pulp. On the other hand, it is common to hear that Baudelaire’s translations of Poe’s tales are an improvement on the originals in terms of the fluidity of the prose. In this observation there is an echo of the effect of Mousset’s translation of Dostoevsky, where it is difficult to distinguish when it’s the author’s voice coming through and

⁶⁹ Idem., p. 72.

⁷⁰ Idem., p. 75-76.

⁷¹ Idem., p. 77.

⁷² Idem., p. 80.

⁷³ Idem., p. 83.

when it's the translator's. Furthermore, Poe had a habit of employing somewhat awkward French phrases in his stories—in particular those like *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which are set in Paris—in an attempt to give his tales an air of European refinement. These americanized dashes of French only add to the ungainliness of Poe's writing and were similarly smoothed over by Baudelaire's translation often being transformed into completely new phrases which attempted to capture the meaning which Poe was trying, unsuccessfully, to convey.⁷⁴ Thus, in translating Poe, Baudelaire can be said to have been transferring into French his impression of Poe rather than strictly what was on the page. Whether this type of seemingly superficial (though, in reality, deeply culturally significant) correction is necessary to bridge certain cultural gaps between an American context and a French one, is another question entirely.

Les Mots Anglais or The Language of Edgar Allan Poe

After Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé is the second best known translator of Poe's work into French. Where Baudelaire focused on Poe's tales, Mallarmé was interested in translating Poe's poetry. This translation project spanned a period of nearly thirty years, from 1862 until the publication of two editions of Mallarmé's translations of Poe's poems, the first in 1888 and the second in 1889.⁷⁵ Mallarmé makes an interesting translator, to say the least. Since much of his philosophy of writing focuses on an idea of pure language, an essential tenet of his beliefs is that poetry cannot be summarized or translated. The language of poetry is chosen carefully and a poem means nothing beyond the words which comprise it and their relationships to each other. This careful construction of meaning creates the danger that a poem will become "dénusés, à travers la traduction, d'intérêt."⁷⁶ In fact Mallarmé focused a lot of his energy on abstracting the

⁷⁴ Edith Philips, "The French of Edgar Allan Poe," *American Speech* (Duke University Press, American Dialect Society, 1927) p. 270–74.

⁷⁵ Alexandra Lukes, "Dictionary and Divination: Mallarmé Translating, Back-Translating, and Not Translating," (*MLN*, 2019) p. 745.

⁷⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Romances et vers d'album," *Œuvres complètes*, p. 244

language he used as much as possible from its common meaning in order to create the effect of evocation unhindered by a clear image. He describes how “les vérités que le poète peut extraire” will later be produced in a communicable form through an act of artistic “transfiguration.”⁷⁷ For Mallarmé, language served more often to point out the absence of its referent than to create a presence in the mind of the reader. Alexandra Lukes, in her essay *Dictionary and Divination*, states, “translation is central to Mallarmé’s conception of poetry,”⁷⁸ meaning that Mallarmé was deeply interested in the arbitrariness of language and tried in his poetry to evoke what is essentially the platonic ideal, the idea lurking behind any given word. This same grappling with meaning and the same extralingual quality is present in the practice of translation.

In her essay “Mallarmé’s Madness,” Alexandra Lukes further explores the connection between Mallarmé’s poetic philosophy and his translation work. Part of what makes Mallarmé such a fascinating translator is his unique approach to translation as a tool for language learning. While it is widely accepted that it is constructive to give students who are learning a language sentences to translate from one language to another, Mallarmé took this idea a step further. He himself took idiomatic sentences in English and translated them to French so that his students could then translate them back into the original English. However, his translations into French were odd, and could perhaps be viewed as incomplete, as they were constructed with French vocabulary but retained the original English grammatical structures so that, in Mallarmé’s eyes, it would be possible for his students to reproduce exactly the original idiomatic expression in English. As Lukes states, this system is “no longer operating unidirectionally from a source language to a target language, but circularly or *à rebours* within a contaminated hybrid

⁷⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, “Grands faits divers,” *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1577.

⁷⁸ Lukes, “Dictionary and Divination,” p. 747.

language.”⁷⁹ This hybrid language forces us to confront the arbitrariness of language by showing the lack of connection between language and its referent. The interlingual space provides the same sort of purity of language that Mallarmé’s obscure poetry seeks. It forces us to recognize our search for meaning and subsequently withholds any definite meaning. Thus we can face language on its own terms, with only an untethered hint of meaning remaining, as difficult to hold onto as water in a pair of cupped hands.

What Mallarmé saw in Poe that struck him as genius, may not have been anything inherent in Poe’s work but rather the experience of reading Poe’s writing in English as a non-native English speaker.⁸⁰ Mallarmé sought in his own work a deferral of meaning, the evocation of a series of images, none graspable for more than a few moments. Upon reading Poe, he may have encountered this same deferral of meaning but for an altogether different reason. A native English speaker will find nothing obscure about Poe’s writing except for the ill lit mansions in which his tales are set. A non-native English speaker, however, may be struck first by the rhythm, melody and shape of the words on the page rather than be immediately caught up in the story that they come together to form. Based on his practice of translating English idioms, Mallarmé may have found some pleasure and reward in the act of translating Poe. It is not unlikely that he reveled in the interlingual space that opened before him when he undertook the translation more than in the original text or the finished translation. However, it is remarkable that Mallarmé’s translations of Poe’s poems are not of the same mutant breed as the translation exercises he devised for his students.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Alexandra Lukes, “Mallarmé’s Madness: Poetry, Pedagogy, and Translation,” *Modernism/Modernity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017) p. 148.

⁸⁰ This same idea surfaces in Peter Lurie’s article on the reception of Faulkner in France. In the case of Faulkner, whose writing is more convoluted than Poe’s, this effect was probably double. (Lurie, “The French Faulkner,” p. 52.)

⁸¹ From Lukes’ “Mallarmé’s Madness” come the following examples of Mallarmé’s idiomatic translation as language learning exercise: “the French “une de ses amies” becomes “une amie des siennes,” in order to produce the

The legibility of Mallarmé's translations may be because he was paying homage to Baudelaire's translation of Poe's poetry. This is clear upon reading Mallarmé and Baudelaire's translations of *The Raven* side by side. Mallarmé takes lines from Baudelaire nearly word for word, and, so, the moments where Mallarmé diverges from Baudelaire in his translation are rendered starkly. Where Baudelaire tries to maintain something of the rhythm and rhyme of the original poem, Mallarmé chooses to translate in such a way that he captures the emotional import of the poem. His word choice is much more exact than Baudelaire's—Mallarmé seems to have carefully considered the connotations of the words and the ways in which the words fit together to evoke certain ideas. Additionally, the legibility of his translations may also be due to the fact that these translations were not meant to serve as a pedagogical tool, but only to transmit Poe's work to a French reading public.

We can see clearly the contrast between the two translation styles when looking at the line, which in the original would have been “But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,/ And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door.”⁸² In Baudelaire's translation, the words napping, rapping and tapping become “sommeillais,” “frapper,” and “taper” to preserve the rhyme and rhythm of the original.⁸³ On the other hand, Mallarmé chose to

English “a friend of hers”; “Que c'est joli!” becomes “combien joli c'est!” to be translated as “how pretty it is!”...” (p. 48).

Or, even more bizarre, from “Dictionary and Divination” (p. 757) comes the example:

Little Betty Blue
 Lost her holiday Shoe.
 What will poor Betty do?
 Why, give her another,
 To match the other,
 And then she will walk in two.

Translated as:

Regardez cette petite fille qui, dans le jardin des Tuileries ou le parc Monceau, a perdu un de ses jolis souliers bleus du dimanche. Comment a-t-elle fait? —C'est sans doute en sautant qu'elle a jeté son soulier loin d'elle. —Vous dites bien, mais que va-t-elle faire? Si vous êtes un gentil petit garçon, vous ramasserez le soulier perdu et le rapporterez à la pauvre petite, qui pleure.

⁸² Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, p. 29.

⁸³ Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, “Le Corbeau,” *Histoires Grotesques et Sérieuses* (Michel Lévy frères, 1871) Wikisource.

translate the same three words as “somnolais,” “frapper,” and “heurter,”⁸⁴ words which rhyme loosely, but do not have the same rhythmic quality of the words which Baudelaire chose.

However, where Baudelaire seeks to convey the almost playful quality of Poe’s poetry, Mallarmé may have been more successful in translating Poe’s meaning. His word choice more precisely captures the effect of Poe’s choice of words in English. This choice of translation fits with Mallarmé’s established style. When translating nursery rhymes and idiomatic phrases, Mallarmé often chose an accurate—at least in his eyes—conveyance of the meaning behind the words, over the preservation of the form of the text.⁸⁵

In the final line of this stanza, Poe writes “here I opened wide the door;—/ Darkness there and nothing more.”⁸⁶ For Baudelaire this line becomes “Et alors j’ouvris la porte toute grande ; —les ténèbres, et rien de plus !”⁸⁷ While this translation seems to be appropriate, when compared with Mallarmé’s, it becomes apparent that Baudelaire was inclined to add an exclamation point at the end of the phrase in order to supplement his translation. Mallarmé chose to translate the line as “Ici j’ouvris, grande, la porte: les ténèbres et rien de plus.”⁸⁸ Mallarmé’s choice of words captures the sentiment of the line much better than Baudelaire’s. Where Baudelaire shifted the syntax of the phrase, Mallarmé simply let the words lie. Succinct, almost unpoetic, and yet the seriousness and depth of emotion which Mallarmé saw in Poe’s work shines through in his translation.

The idea of Poe that emerged from Mallarmé’s translations is different from the one created by Baudelaire. For Mallarmé, Poe was successful in evoking pure language in his poetry. In his poem *Le tombeau d’Edgar Poe*, Mallarmé evokes “le poète” who gives “un sens plus pur

⁸⁴ Stéphane Mallarmé and Edgar Allan Poe, “Le Corbeau,” (Richard Lesclide, 1875) Wikisource.

⁸⁵ Lukes, “Mallarmé’s Madness,” p. 147-48.

⁸⁶ Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, p. 29.

⁸⁷ Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, “Le Corbeau.”

⁸⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé and Edgar Allan Poe, “Le Corbeau.”

aux mots de la tribu.”⁸⁹ Lukes concedes that the mallarméan idea of purity is still debated by critics, but that it is possible to claim that this poetic purity “is inherently related to a form of obscurity that transforms the familiar words of the tribe” into something more.⁹⁰ Like Baudelaire, Mallarmé saw Poe as a misunderstood poetic genius whose work would only be truly appreciated after his death. However, where Baudelaire highlighted the grotesque and the perverse in Poe’s work, Mallarmé was focused on, as he states in the short prose piece from *Divagations*, “Sur Edgar Poe,” the “significatif silence,” similar to Mallarmé’s own idea of the white of the page, in Poe’s poems—the “source innée” from which flowed Poe’s genius—in short, the poeticism of Poe, the complex but invisible structures of his poems, rather than the ways in which he challenged the conventionally beautiful or embellished reality.⁹¹ From Mallarmé, a new conception of Edgar Allan Poe emerged. At once in contrast to and in harmony with the existing Baudelairian Poe, Mallarmé’s Poe came to find a home in the French imagination. The paradoxical figure that Henri Justin highlighted can be seen emerging from the coexisting interpretations of Poe by French literary celebrities. However, this multiplicity and contradiction is not inherent in the work of Poe, who constructed a singular and coherent body of work. It is simply through interpretation that the idea of Poe becomes fractured and variable.

Valéry and the Philosophy of Composition

The second to last translation of Edgar Allan Poe that Baudelaire published was of the essay *Eureka* in 1863. This essay serves as a perfect example of the dichotomy between the American and the French reception of Edgar Allan Poe. While frequently referenced as a part of Poe’s French œuvre, this essay is rarely included in American collections of Poe’s work. Though

⁸⁹ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, (Gallimard, 1945) p. 189.

⁹⁰ Lukes, “Mallarmé’s Madness,” p. 155.

⁹¹ Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 872.

it had been translated much earlier by Baudelaire, *Eureka* truly entered into the French literary canon thanks to the essay published by Paul Valéry in 1921, *Au sujet d'Eurêka*. Specifically, the idea in *Eurêka* that captures Valéry's attention is Poe's term "consistency." Though Poe provides no definition of the word *consistency*, Paul Valéry tries his hand at defining the term in his essay. Valéry states "Dans le système de Poe, la *consistance* est à la fois le moyen de la découverte et la découverte elle-même".⁹² He goes on to say that "l'univers est construit sur un plan dont la symétrie profonde est, en quelque sorte, présente dans l'intime structure de notre esprit."⁹³ The part of Poe that captured Valéry's attention is the inclination towards structure and order. Where Baudelaire coveted a thematic alignment with his own work and where Mallarmé saw pure poetry, Valéry found an emulable artistic method. In Valéry's eyes, Poe represented "l'instinct poétique" which drives a true artist "aveuglément à la vérité,"⁹⁴ the attainment of the truth being Valéry's idea of the purpose of art.

Valéry was fascinated by Poe's essays on poetic composition. In this case, as in many others in which Poe is exalted by a French author, Valéry seems to pick out the bits of Poe's theory of composition that are in line with his own beliefs about poetry and ignore those that are not. Through this curation, he develops his own figure of Poe to use as an artistic idol. Not only does the figure of Poe once again mutate and multiply, but his association with American culture becomes abstracted. While this denaturalization is in part the fault of his critics and translators, Poe himself fostered an air of European refinement. He often (mis)used small French phrases in his work—phrases which Baudelaire would rarely let lie in translation—and many of Poe's stories take place in European settings. This was just another part of Poe's larger game of

⁹² Paul Valéry, "Au sujet d'Eurêka," *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier, (Gallimard, 1957), p. 857.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

marketing himself as an artist driven by some deeper purpose and disconnected from the material world. A game to which Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry all fell victim.

The way that Valéry conceived of Poe evolved over his lifetime and this evolution is reflected in his *Cahiers*. Where he seemed to have read his own beliefs into Poe's work as a younger man, he becomes more aware of the dichotomy between Poe and himself as he matures. One of the ideas which initially struck a young Valéry in Poe's essay *The Philosophy of Composition* was that of the necessity of originality in poetic composition. However, what is remarkable here is that Valéry read into Poe's words the opposite meaning to what was intended. Poe states that "originality" has "a positive merit of the first class" but "demands in its attainment less of invention than negation."⁹⁵ As Reino Virtanen points out in *Allusions to Poe's Poetic Theory in Valéry's Cahiers*, Valéry misinterpreted this section of Poe's theory. He wrote in his *Cahiers* that Poe is *unlike* Baudelaire in that he does not consider "le nouveau comme ayant une valeur en soi."⁹⁶ Valéry may have been less astute in his analysis of Poe's theoretical writing than Baudelaire was. Baudelaire did not take Poe's scientific method of composition at face value, stating that Poe "a mis d'affectation à cacher la spontanéité, à simuler le sang-froid et la délibération."⁹⁷ Where Valéry read credulously, Baudelaire saw that Poe's poetic theory was more of a facade than an honest dissection of his compositional methods.

Still, the reason for which Valéry most admires Poe is the scientific approach to the poem laid out in "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle." Valéry believed that Poe was "le premier à songer, à donner un fondement théorique pur aux ouvrages."⁹⁸ But, in a similar manner to Mallarmé, Valéry admired Poe's ideas while conceding that the work that Poe

⁹⁵ Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, p. 438.

⁹⁶ Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, vol. II. (Gallimard, 1973) p. 1180.

⁹⁷ Baudelaire, *Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*, p. 28.

⁹⁸ Valéry, *Cahiers*, vol. II. p. 1208.

initiated may not have been fully realized (in reality the disconnect between Poe's work and his 'theory' lies in the fact that he never wrote anything without a sense of personal irony). Valéry considered himself to be "le premier à essayer de ne pas recourir du tout aux notions anciennes — mais à tout reprendre sur des bases purement analytiques."⁹⁹ He was inspired by Poe and incorporated Poe's ideas, or at least what he considered them to be, into his own philosophy of composition. However, in his own conception, Valéry transcended and surpassed Poe in the realm of poetry. Poe's fame in France is in a large part linked to his role as inspiration for the school of French poets which began with Baudelaire, his own work taking secondary role to the work of those he inspired.

The figure of Poe began, in the eyes of Baudelaire, as a tortured alcoholic artist with a gift for a unique prose which walked the line between the beautiful and the grotesque. This figure grew to include the inspired poet that Mallarmé evokes in *Tombeau d'Edgar Poe* and the highly organized thinker that Valéry saw in *Eureka* and *Philosophy of Composition*. Because all three of these poets reference Poe as a strong influence, the idea of Poe that exists in the French consciousness is intimately linked to their work. The Poe that is known to the French reading public is filtered through a lens of Baudelarian and Mallarméan translation as well as Valérian analysis. On top of this, the critical work of Jules Verne celebrates Poe as having "créé un genre à part, ne procédant que de lui-même,"¹⁰⁰ by which Verne means the highly realistic and analytical style of writing which laid the groundwork for both science fiction and the detective genre. Poe is an odd figure in this sense, having been at once underappreciated in his own right and becoming an incredible influence on many other writers. His work marks a turning point in literature, and especially in French literature. Many think that his writing leaves much to be

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jules Verne, *Edgar Poe et ses Œuvres*, (Arvensa Éditions, 1864) Kindle edition.

desired,¹⁰¹ but it is perhaps exactly his shortcomings which inspired the outpouring of creativity in the artists who read him. Suffice to say that Edgar Allan Poe would have been delighted had he lived to see how the French reacted to his *œuvre* and augmented the authorial myth which he created for himself.

¹⁰¹ P. Mansell Jones, "Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé: A Problem of Literary Judgement," *The Modern Language Review* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 1944) p. 236.

CHAPTER 3: ENTRENCHED IN THE IRREMEDEABLE

'He writes like an angel,' said Arnold Bennett of William Faulkner. Presumably when the late lamented author of Clayhanger penned that compliment, he was thinking of style. Certain it is that when one considers content, the stuff of which Faulkner's stories are made, the young American is better described as writing like a devil.

—Paul H. Bixler (1931)

Introducing Faulkner

William Faulkner was first introduced to France in the period following the first World War. This was a period when, according to Maurice Edgar Coindreau, the French were open to new ideas, riding high on the joy of victory.¹⁰² While this idea is in conflict with his earlier conception of French literature being receptive to foreign influence when showing signs of lassitude, this was a period (between 1928 and 1939) in which a fair number of American authors were translated and read by the French. Faulkner's name first appeared on June 1st 1931 in an article published by Coindreau in *La Nouvelle revue française*. It is popular lore among the French literary community to state that only three articles had been published about Faulkner in the United States up until this point.¹⁰³ This may not be entirely true. It seems that much had been published on Faulkner, but that, as there was no central literary magazine in America with an authority similar to that *La Nouvelle revue française* commanded during the interwar period, the writings of small local literary critics went unnoticed. The novel that finally roused the widespread recognition of the American public was *Sanctuary* (1931) which—in the words of a contemporary American reviewer, Alan Reynolds—“in spite of material ugliness,” “has the formal beauty of a complicated puzzle masterfully solved.”¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, in France, after getting a taste of Faulkner's style through Coindreau's translations of the two short stories *Septembre*

¹⁰² Coindreau, “William Faulkner in France,” p. 85.

¹⁰³ Idem, p. 86.

¹⁰⁴ Alan Reynolds Thompson, “Untitled,” *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews* by M. Thomas Inge and Robert Emory Blackwell (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 60.

ardent and *Une rose pour Emily* in 1932,¹⁰⁵ R. N. Rimbault and Henri Delgove set out to translate *Sanctuary*.

It was this first book of Faulkner's to be published in French under the title *Sanctuaire* for which André Malraux would write his famous préface. It was also this novel which made Faulkner's reputation in France.¹⁰⁶ Malraux's preface gives insight into the initial French idea of Faulkner. Most famously, Malraux describes *Sanctuaire* as "l'intrusion de la tragédie grecque dans le roman policier."¹⁰⁷ Gisèle Sapiro shows in "Faulkner in France" that there is a fair amount of evidence in the archives of Gallimard which points to the complex calculations—from weighing of the fame of preface writers and translators to cutting deals with Faulkner's American publisher to secure exclusive rights to translating Faulkner's work—which led to *Sanctuaire* being published prior to *Tandis que j'agonise*. Coindreau himself was in the process of translating *Tandis que j'agonise* and the preface was to be written by Valéry Larbaud, who was a translator and admirer of James Joyce, one of Faulkner's greatest influences. Sapiro posits that it was both the superficial accessibility of *Sanctuaire* and the preexisting social capital of Malraux which led to this novel being published first.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Rimbault seems to have pressured Gaston Gallimard, playing into a rivalry which existed and would intensify between Rimbault and Coindreau as translators of American fiction.¹⁰⁹

The French critics were accepting of the extreme violence of *Sanctuary*, the very thing that seems to have caused such a stir among the American critics. In a contemporary critical article from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Paul H. Bixler states "Faulkner's liking for narrative

¹⁰⁵ Idem, p. 87.

¹⁰⁶ Coindreau, "William Faulkner in France," p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ Malraux, "Préface," *Sanctuaire*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Sapiro, "Faulkner in France," p. 399-400.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, p. 396.

tricks and for horrible detail would link him naturally in American literature to Poe.”¹¹⁰ He describes Faulkner’s work as being in the school of the terror tale but “instead of concocting his novels out of ghosts, sliding panels and unexplainable shrieks at midnight, he has introduced all the terrifying possibilities of modern abnormal psychology.”¹¹¹ In fact, this first novel of Faulkner’s to be available to French audiences, is one which was comparatively negatively received by American critics who had enjoyed both *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Unlike in Faulkner’s earlier works, which mimic in many ways the convoluted style of James Joyce, the narrative of *Sanctuary* is comparatively easy to follow. There are few moments in which the thread of the story becomes entangled in the emotions and thoughts of a character in such a way that it becomes difficult to decipher Faulkner’s meaning. It is consequently much more blunt, and in the eyes of the American critics who had followed Faulkner’s career since the publication of *Soldier’s Pay* (1926), uncharacteristic of Faulkner as an artist.

In the United States, many would be quick to claim William Faulkner as a distinctly American author. At the moment in which his work appeared on the scene, there was a strong desire to define the American novel in contrast to its various European counterparts. Philip E. Wheelwright, an American critic writing for *The Symposium* in April 1931, lays out the terms upon which an American novelistic tradition would be founded, specifying that the American novel must “create form” rather than having a form “imposed by European plaster-casts.”¹¹² Additionally, Wheelwright argues that the American novel should treat American material. In both respects, Faulkner is successful. Though his style is inspired by Joyce and a handful of other

¹¹⁰ Paul H. Bixler, “In *Sanctuary* Wm. Faulkner Plumbs the Depths of Horror,” *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 53-54.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Philip E. Wheelwright. “Untitled.” In *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews*. p. 60.

modern novelists, he does not simply copy, he integrates a modern style with content that is unique to the American South. Alan Thompson describes the form of his novels as “intense exploration of momentary experience” fused with “the classical formal beauty of an intricate plot.”¹¹³ The other distinct trait of Faulkner’s writing that was remarked upon by Faulkner’s critics, both American and French, is his adept treatment of horrific subjects. He, like Poe, manages to describe gruesome and repulsive scenes without making them ridiculous, producing real terror in his reader.

It is interesting that the novel with which the French reading public was introduced to William Faulkner is at once one of his most violent and one of his most accessible novels. However, it can be seen in Coindreau’s summation of Faulkner’s reception in France, that, like Poe, Faulkner is assimilated into the French literary canon by the claim that he “is not a regionalist writer but rather an artist who draws from the same sources that have always fed the great literatures of the world.”¹¹⁴ In other words, these American authors are more easily recognized as great writers when their Americanness is obscured by assimilation to the prolific writers of the European literary canon. Paradoxically, the effect of abstraction from the American context is at once the product of translation and exactly what many translators would seek to avoid. Much translation theory idealizes a translation which is translucent, allowing the original work to show through. The cases of both Faulkner and Poe show that the real effect of translation is to familiarize the unfamiliar and therefore to fundamentally change it from unfamiliar to familiar. Like Poe, Faulkner was recognized and written about by some of the most prolific French writers of his time, allowing him to become embedded in the French literary establishment through the work of his contemporaries. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre both

¹¹³ Alan Reynolds Thompson, “Untitled,” *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews*, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ Coindreau, “William Faulkner in France,” p. 88.

celebrated Faulkner as a great writer, creating a place for him in the hearts and minds of his French readers.

Temporalité existentialiste

Sartre, in his 1939 essay “À propos de « Le Bruit et la Fureur » : La temporalité chez Faulkner,” fixated on the themes of time and action in the work of Faulkner. What Sartre notices is something remarked upon by many critics: the fact that, at the moment of reception by the reader, all of the important action of Faulkner’s novels has already happened. Nothing ever happens in the present, the present is “plein de trous” through which “les choses passées l’envahissent, fixes, immobiles, silencieuses comme des juges ou comme des regards.”¹¹⁵ The moments which move the plots of his novels are always recounted by one character to another and understood in the past tense. While the time of Faulkner’s novels is not a wholly realistic time, it does resemble in many ways the experience of understanding the world through a lens of existentialism or absurdism. The world reflected in Faulkner’s novels, at least through Sartre’s eyes, has no sense or discernible order. It is only through the narrativization of an event, its being told, that it becomes understandable. In Sartre’s understanding, Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury* is constructed around one main tenet: “Le malheur de l’homme est d’être temporel.”¹¹⁶ He makes this statement in reference to a scene in the novel in which one of the main characters, Quentin, breaks his watch in such a way that it no longer tells time but goes on ticking. To Sartre, this scene demonstrates Quentin being freed from the false understanding that narrative gives us of our experience of the world. Thus, Sartre argues, through his unique a-chronological style of writing, Faulkner shows his reader the present, the only true time. This present is “catastrophique

¹¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, “À propos de « Le Bruit et la Fureur » : La temporalité chez Faulkner,” *Critiques littéraires (Situations I)*, 1975 ed. (Gallimard, 1947) p. 89.

¹¹⁶ Idem, p. 86.

par essence,” it is pure “evenement.”¹¹⁷ Thus, the only logical way for the story to be told as a chronological narrative within Faulkner’s framework is as snippets of stories told between characters.

Sartre took such a strong interest in Faulkner’s work because he, like Baudelaire or Valéry in the case of Poe, saw his own philosophy reflected in it. His interpretation of *Le Bruit et la Fureur* reflects many of the ideas which he put forward in his first novel *La Nausée* which was published in 1938, a year before « La temporalité chez Faulkner. » The narrator of *La Nausée*, Antoine Roquentin, formulates the beginnings of the ideas of temporalité that appear in Sartre’s essay. In the words of Antoine, “pour que l’événement le plus banal devienne une aventure, il faut et il suffit qu’on se mette à le raconter.”¹¹⁸ Here we are given a necessary and sufficient condition under which any event can become, essentially, a story. Furthermore, when we turn a disordered array of events, of “les jours qui s’ajoutent aux jours sans rime ni raison,” into a narrative, “tout change.”¹¹⁹ Sartre clearly has already conceived of the idea of human beings as making sense of their reality by creating narratives out of the incomprehensible and unrelated collection of events that makes up life, but saw this narrativization as a fallacy. Seeing this idea reflected in Faulkner’s work as well, caused him to see Faulkner as a kindred spirit, but may also have allowed him to more clearly articulate the idea of temporality that was nascent in *La Nausée*. Sartre found in Faulkner a philosophy similar to his own, yet different enough that he was able to use it to clarify his previously conceived ideas.

Annick Chapdelaine makes the broader claim that, on a psychological level, the literary scene in France at the time that Faulkner was being translated into French was primed to receive his work. The three works which Chapdelaine highlights as illustrative of the pervasive literary

¹¹⁷ Idem, p. 87.

¹¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Gallimard, 1938) p. 64.

¹¹⁹ Idem, p. 64-65.

mood are *La Condition humaine* (1933), *La Nausée* (1938), and *L'Étranger* (1942).¹²⁰ All three of these novels, not inconsequentially, were written by men who would go on to write about Faulkner. All three novels bring to the fore questions of human experience and meaning, and elicit feelings of discomfort in the reader. It is not hard to see how a public which was excited by the (proto) existentialist and absurdist works of Malraux, Sartre and Camus would also be taken with the complex novels of Faulkner. Questions of morality and meaning, as well as an exploration of subjective experience of the world, can be found in Faulkner's novels and felt through his experimental style. However, Faulkner's work has other dimensions to it beyond an existentialist bent.

What Can Be Considered Untranslatable?

Chapdelaine argues that the literary atmosphere brought on by existentialist and absurdist works made a tragic interpretation of Faulkner "inevitable" in the French context.¹²¹ Translation is to some degree a reading, while still being a writing. It is a reception of the original work; in some ways a reproduction and in other ways a whole new work. Chapdelaine references Meschonnic's theory that translations reflect the ideologies present during the period in which they are produced. Works are retranslated to conform to the ideologies of the moment, where the original work simply adapts itself, being able to be reread and re-interpreted. Chapdelaine believes that the humor inherent in Faulkner's English work was not communicated in French translation due not to a poor translation but rather a mis-interpretation on the part of the translator. Whether this is true or not, an interesting question that is raised is whether the translation of a work is equally as adaptable to new contexts and interpretations as the original text. If it is not, then what is it exactly which causes a translation to be limited in ways that an

¹²⁰ Annick Chapdelaine, "Faulkner in French: Humor Obliterated" (*Faulkner Journal*, 1991-1992) p. 50.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

original work is not? Is it the inherent connection and simultaneous disconnection with the original work that tethers the translation to a specific historical and geographical context? In the end all that can be said is that a work can be re-translated but it can never be re-written.

Without making any claims as to whether a particular translation is good or bad, it will be illuminating to look closely at the choices made by Faulkner's translators and the way these choices affect the overall feeling of the work in translation. One of the biggest difficulties in translation is always to adequately capture the cultural connotations of a given familiar form of speech. In *Sanctuary*, the two young men, Virgil and Fonzo, are what one might refer to as country bumpkins. They've never spent much time in the city and are in awe of everything they encounter in Memphis. Their innocence and their rural upbringing is hinted at through the way they speak, frequently using contractions like "ain't" or omitting the subject of the sentence. Faulkner also uses a phonetic spelling of certain particularities of this type of vernacular language, using "un" for one, "git" for get, and "hyer" for here. To an American reader, the accent and speech patterns of Fonzo and Virgil have a clear significance. However, in the French translation by Delgove and Raimbault, the translated speech does not carry the same connotations. The most that Raimbault and Delgove have done to mimic the familiar speech of any characters is to insert certain elisions which produce the effect of casually spoken French rather than precise literary language.¹²²

Chapdelaine claims that the inability of the French to portray the cultural connotations of the vernacular speech of Faulkner's characters takes away from the humor of Faulkner's work.¹²³ While it may be that the humor of an episode like that of Fonzo and Virgil, in which the two young men are put up at a brothel without knowing the nature of their hostess's work, comes

¹²² William Faulkner, *Sanctuaire*, Trans. R.-N. Raimbault and Henri Delgove (Gallimard, 1972 [1933]).

¹²³ Chapdelaine, "Faulkner in French: Humor Obliterated," p. 55-56.

through just fine in the French *Sanctuaire*, something certainly has been lost in translation. As stated previously, it may be impossible for a translator to adequately translate cultural connotations, and thus the choices of Raimbault and Delgove in translating this section cannot be objectively critiqued. However, the idea of Faulkner and his work that comes through in French will certainly be different from its English counterpart, because the translation is necessarily as much the work of the translator as of the original author. A very stark example of this kind of untranslatability can be found in the N-word. The French equivalent used in *Sanctuaire* is “nègre.”¹²⁴ In French, the word “nègre” has strong connotations and is increasingly considered to be racist and inappropriate. However, it is generally agreed that the English N-word, which is tied tightly to the history of slavery in the United States and to the torture and abuse of black men and women, is not exactly equal to its French translation.

Where an English reader often has a deeply visceral reaction to the use of the N-word, a French reader may not have as strong of a reaction to the word “nègre.” The N-word is almost universally considered to be unutterable by non-black people and is seldom even pronounced when reading a text aloud in which it has been used. However, it was only ten years ago that the inappropriateness of the French term for a ghost writer, *nègre*, was seriously protested by the French public. This is not to say that the word is any less insulting than the N-word but that it should be recognized that these words do not mean the same thing. Thus, the harshness of Faulkner’s racial language, while portrayed as accurately as possible by his translators, may not be obvious to French readers. In fact, the racial dynamics of the United States may not be obvious to French readers. The conception of race in America is rooted in the history of slavery, whereas in France it is rooted in the French colonization of Algeria and other parts of Northern

¹²⁴ Faulkner, *Sanctuaire*.

Africa. It is difficult to translate the idea of American racism into a culture where racism is of a different, though equally horrible, nature.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the relationship between the Compson family and their black servant, Dilsey, is a complex illustration of many of the racial tensions in the South. Dilsey falls into a classic stereotype of the motherly older black woman. It's Dilsey who holds the Compson house together. While she is a free woman in a technical sense, the work she does for the Compson family is taken for granted and she and her sons, who collectively perform all of the domestic household labor, are repeatedly referred to as lazy and useless. An extension of the bitterness left by the American civil war, the belief that black people had been given a soft life and that slavery had been beneficial to them, permeated the South in the period between the world wars, when Faulkner was writing. When Coindreau writes that Dilsey "retains our attention," "not because of the color of her skin" but because of "the nobility of her character,"¹²⁵ he is missing the complete picture. He is not entirely wrong, but to say that "all men of my generation in France have known in the homes of their parents and their grandparents white counterparts of Dilsey,"¹²⁶ is to erase the uniquely American aspect of this socio-economic situation which is highly determined by race and history. What is so remarkable about the dynamic between Dilsey and Jason Compson, the head of the Compson family, is the simultaneous dependency of Jason on Dilsey and his deep resentment of her. As Faulkner's characters become disconnected from their specific context in the American South around the turn of the century, Faulkner does as well. Coindreau's translation reinforces the idea of a universal Faulkner; of Faulkner as simply a great writer rather than a great American writer.

¹²⁵ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "On Translating Faulkner," *The Time of William Faulkner*, p. 89.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

A cultural challenge posed by Faulkner's work, and one which Coindreau readily admits to, is the import of Faulkner's so-called puritanism. In fact, Faulkner wrote in a letter to Coindreau in reference to the essay that Coindreau wrote in the *Lettres étrangères* section of *La Nouvelle revue française*, "I see now that that I have a quite decided strain of puritanism (in its proper sense, of course; not our American one) regarding sex."¹²⁷ In his essay, Coindreau references the line from Faulkner's early novel *Soldier's Pay* (1926) which reads "Sex and death: the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us!"¹²⁸ Further on, in the same paragraph, Coindreau compares Faulkner to "a monk in the Middle Ages" who sees death as synonymous with "putrefaction."¹²⁹ On the matter of sex, Coindreau regards Faulkner as a "severe moralist" who sees the sexual act as always "bestial" or "perverse."¹³⁰ The simple fact that Coindreau has included this clarification in his essay, which was meant to serve as an introduction of Faulkner to the French reading public, shows that he felt that this puritanical aspect of Faulkner's writing would need to be clarified for a French audience. It is not wrong for a translator to attempt to reduce cultural friction, however, this case shows to what extent Faulkner cannot be limited to an abstract universal figure. Coindreau simultaneously and paradoxically recognizes Faulkner's puritanism as essential to understanding his work—Faulkner's brand of puritanism is essentially tied to his American upbringing—while attempting to abstract Faulkner from a specifically American context in order to allow him to be understood by a French audience.

The Creation of the French Faulkner

¹²⁷ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "The Faulkner I Knew," *The Time of William Faulkner*, p. 93.

¹²⁸ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "William Faulkner," *The Time of William Faulkner*, p. 29.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The picture that Coindreau paints of Faulkner in this introductory essay, which appeared in the *NRF* in June of 1931, almost dares his reader to take on the challenge of reading and liking Faulkner's work. In his final paragraph, Coindreau states "Since Europe has contributed much to his formation, she has little right to ignore him."¹³¹ What exactly Europe has contributed to Faulkner's formation is not elaborated on by Coindreau, but it may be extrapolated that he is referring to the fact that the majority of what was considered great literature at the time of Faulkner's formation came from Europe. In contrast to the American audiences who Coindreau continuously claims have underappreciated Faulkner's work, a European audience may be composed of those "whose intelligence takes pleasure in the subtle rules of the game" of Faulkner's writing.¹³² Furthermore, an educated European audience would recognize the European influence (James Joyce in terms of style; Coindreau makes a brief case for the influence of the Symbolists¹³³) and the peppering of references to famous French literature in Faulkner's novels. Coindreau augments the image of Faulkner as an artist in need of proper recognition in an article titled indelicately "One Year After His Death Faulkner is Still Misjudged in the United States." His argument in this article is that the American public find Faulkner's novels too morbid and are loathe to see them translated for the fear that they will misrepresent America abroad.¹³⁴ Though it may just be that Coindreau was a serious admirer of Faulkner's work and did not agree with the way that he was received by his American audience, from the outside he has very effectively created an image of Faulkner as a misunderstood artist. This trope, deeply embedded in French literary culture as that of the *poète maudit*, though never

¹³¹ Idem, p.30.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ "The strange eyes that look "like rubber knobs, like they'd give to the touch and then recover with the whorled smudge of the thumb on them" symbolize all the malignant power of Popeye just as Mélisande's golden hair symbolizes all her beauty. (William Faulkner perhaps owes more to the Symbolists than to James Joyce.)" Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "William Faulkner," p. 28.

¹³⁴ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, "One Year After His Death Faulkner is Still Misjudged in the United States," *The Time of William Faulkner*, p. 106-107.

explicitly accorded to Faulkner by Coindreau, aids Coindreau in creating an interest in Faulkner's work in France.

Coindreau was only one of many—though he may be the most central figure—French writers enlisted in the effort to prime a French audience for the reception of Faulkner's novels. Malraux's famous introduction to *Sanctuaire* has already been touched upon in this paper, but since this preface is largely credited with introducing Faulkner to the French public, it is worth taking another look. Malraux begins by stating “Faulkner sait fort bien que les détectives n'existent pas.”¹³⁵ By which he means that Faulkner knows that “une « bonne police » est une police qui a su mieux qu'une autre organiser ses indicateurs.” Already Malraux has laid the groundwork for the bleak world of Faulkner's novels where nothing is sugar coated or imbued with magic. The only thing that could be said to exceed the realm of faithful realism are the horrors that Faulkner presents us with. But even these are not fully outside the realm of the ordinary. Malraux argues that through the “atmosphère policière sans policiers, de gang aux gangsters crasseux, parfois lâches, sans puissance,” Faulkner primes his reader to accept “sans quitter un minimum de vraisemblance, le viol, le lynchage, l'assassinat,” among other forms of violence.¹³⁶

The reader should not get too caught up in the plot, Malraux warns, for “limitée à elle-même, l'intrigue serait de l'ordre du jeu d'échecs—artistiquement nulle.”¹³⁷ Instead, the plot serves as a medium through which to communicate some deeper moralistic or poetic truths. The world that Faulkner builds before his readers eyes is one in which “l'homme n'existe qu'écrasé.”¹³⁸ It is a world where there are neither “de valeurs, ni même de psychologie, malgré

¹³⁵ Malraux, “Préface,” *Sanctuaire*, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Idem, p. 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

les monologues intérieurs.”¹³⁹ According to Malraux, the only thing that exists in this world is a “Destin,” a fate, “derrière tous ces être différents et semblables, comme la mort derrière une salle des incurables.”¹⁴⁰ From this claim that fate is the essential constant in Faulkner’s work, it is easy to trace the development of the idea of Faulkner as a tragedian. Already Malraux has laid the groundwork for his claim that “*Sanctuaire*, c’est l’intrusion de la tragédie grecque dans le roman policier.”¹⁴¹ Through this analysis, the French reader is prepared to reduce Faulkner’s work to what Malraux calls “l’irréparable.”¹⁴² The translation of the novel, which in many ways erases historical and geographical specificity, aids in the abstraction of *Sanctuaire* away from a novel about the disintegration of the institutions of the American South to an epic which illustrates universal truths. Where the novel in its original form contained both of these possibilities simultaneously, the filtering lens of translation reduces the textual complexity of the work and therefore reduces it from a multiplicity to a singularity.

The influence that Malraux and Coindreau had on the reception of Faulkner is affirmed by later critical writing about Faulkner's work. Sartre famously stated in 1948 that “la littérature américaine, c’est la littérature Coindreau.”¹⁴³ While Michel Gresset believes that what this statement truly means is simply that Sartre did not speak English,¹⁴⁴ it still sheds light on how deeply the idea of Faulkner (and other American writers of the same period) was influenced by the criticism and the translation of Coindreau. Albert Camus plainly lays out the important roles of both Malraux and Coindreau in his introduction to the dramatized version of *Requiem for a Nun*, translated by Coindreau and adapted to a script by Camus himself. Camus begins by stating

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Idem, p. 11.

¹⁴² Idem, p. 9.

¹⁴³ Michel Gresset, “Maurice Edgar Coindreau, Traducteur ou « Passeur » ?” *Figures Du Passeur*, edited by Paul Carmignani (Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2013) p. 385.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

frankly that “cet avant-propos n’a pas pour but de présenter Faulkner au public français.”¹⁴⁵ For, “Malraux s’en est chargé avec éclat, il y a une vingtaines d’années, et Faulkner, grâce à lui, a pu connaître chez nous une gloire que son pays ne lui avait pas encore accordée.”¹⁴⁶ This statement, in addition to showing the heavy influence of Malraux’s preface on the French figure of Faulkner, also shows the success of Coindreau’s portrayal of Faulkner as a *poète maudit*. Camus goes on to say that he also does not intend his preface to celebrate the translations of Coindreau, because “les lecteurs français savent que la littérature américaine d’aujourd’hui n’a pas de meilleur ni de plus efficace ambassadeur parmi nous.”¹⁴⁷ By the time this theatrical version of *Requiem pour une nonne* was published in 1957—twenty six years after the publication of Coindreau’s first article on Faulkner in *La Nouvelle revue française*—the figure of Faulkner was deeply entwined with that of Coindreau (and Malraux to a lesser extent), almost as inseparable as the figures of Baudelaire and Poe.

Translation as Construction

Camus continues, on the subject of Coindreau’s translation of Faulkner, with a comparison between the initial translation of Dostoevsky and the translation of Faulkner. He states “Qu’on imagine Faulkner trahi comme l’a été Dostoïevsky par ses premiers adaptateurs et l’on mesurera mieux le rôle joué par M. E. Coindreau.”¹⁴⁸ While Camus is using the example of Dostoevsky’s translation into French as a juxtaposition to Coindreau’s translation of Faulkner, to show the success of the latter, the comparison establishes both instances of translation as measurable by some common metric. The question that then arises, is what is the metric by which Camus is measuring the accuracy and worth of a given translation? The word “trahi”

¹⁴⁵ Albert Camus, “Avant-propos,” *Requiem pour une nonne* by William Faulkner, trans. Maurice-Edgar Coindreau (Gallimard, 1988) p. ix.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

indicates that he is considering the fidelity of the translation to the original text. While it may appear obvious that the translation of a text should resemble the original, fidelity is a murky metric by which to measure translation. Classic questions which arise ask whether it is more important to be loyal to the style of the work or the literal meaning of the words, or whether a loyal translation would preserve some semblance of foreignness. The problem, then, is that the conception of proper translation has changed over time. The initial translation of Dostoevsky was not a mistranslation in the sense that the *meaning* of the words in Russian was not accurately transmitted through the French equivalents, but rather that the socio-economic *connotation* of the grammatical structures and word choice was not adequately attended to.

Once again we are brought back to the perennial enigma facing any translator: do texts have an essential character? Mallarmé would tell us yes, there is an essential meaning—a sort of pure platonic idea—evoked by the exact collection of signifiers and their shifting relations to one another used to construct a given text. When conceiving of translation in this way, one cannot simply translate by finding the equivalent word in a cross language dictionary and rewriting the sentence in another language’s vocabulary. Mallarmé illustrates this, inadvertently, through his awkward and nonsensical translations of English idioms and nursery rhymes. For instance, as Lukes shows in *Mallarmé’s Madness*, he translated “what happened to him” as “quoi arriva à lui,” a word for word translation which retains the English sentence structure.¹⁴⁹ The implicit process of moving between grammatical systems is so deeply embedded in our concept of translation that we overlook it. Instead of translating each word, the translator’s process is one of deconstruction of the original text, of how it evokes meaning, and a reconstruction of this same meaning through another language. In this conception of translation, it is not so much the words themselves that count, but the infinitely shifting relational space in between them.

¹⁴⁹ Lukes, “Mallarmé’s Madness,” p. 147-48.

Inherent, also, in this concept of translation as deconstruction and reconstruction of a text is the formative role of the translator. One of the most popular conceptions of a translation—or at least a good translation—of a work is as a fairly transparent layer through which the original can be seen. When conceiving of translation as a deconstruction/reconstruction, the translation is not a layer added to the original text. Rather, it is as if one took the original text and put it through a futuristic transportation device which would break the object down atom by atom and reconstruct it somewhere else. What is reconstructed is ostensibly the same thing as what was deconstructed, but only if the reconstruction happens with extreme exactitude. In the case of the translation of the work, the biases of the translator are bound to affect the way in which they construct their work. With each small choice that the translator makes about the language that they will use to reconstruct the meaning of the work in another language, they augment an image of the author. This image is built through the style of the work, the word choice, the portrayal of the characters, all of which are read as reflections of the author. Thus, the more of an author's work is translated, the richer their image (in translation) becomes and the further it strays from the image of the author reflected in the original work.

If any more evidence is needed to demonstrate that the French successfully appropriated Faulkner into their literary canon and into their culture more broadly, the following can serve as definitive proof. In 1942, while World War II was still raging, President Franklin Roosevelt, in an effort to “enhance de Gaulle’s reputation in the eyes of the American public,” suggested to Jack Warner, of Warner Brother Pictures, that he make a film glorifying de Gaulle and his Free Forces.¹⁵⁰ Is it any wonder that the screenwriter who took over this project was William Faulkner? Not only is it noted that Faulkner had a passion for war stories,¹⁵¹ but also that he

¹⁵⁰ Edwin McDowell, “Books: Faulkner Scripts for Film on De Gaulle,” *The New York Times* (30 Oct. 1984)

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

“admired the French people.” Though the film was never made, this odd little episode might tell us something about Faulkner’s feelings towards the French. Perhaps Coindreau had convinced even Faulkner himself that he had, deep down, a *French* soul.

CONCLUSION

Confirmation bias is now a widely recognized idea so it should come as no great shock that the French literary establishment saw in Poe and in Faulkner what they wanted to see. They perceived traits in the works of these two authors that reflected their own ideas and interests. There is a reassuring validation that comes from seeing your own ideas conceived of independently by another. Furthermore, this identification of the self in something (or someone) other provokes a desire to assimilate that other, the little bit of outside, into oneself. This can be done without ceding any real intellectual ground to the other by claiming that it has simply always belonged. This is not to say that Poe and Faulkner haven't had a marked influence on French literature—they both have. However, in order to preserve the idea of French (or more generally European) intellectual superiority, in order to avoid the recognition of this influence as *American*, the French welcomed Poe and Faulkner as estranged—not strangers.

Also at play in the reception of American literature by the French is simply a difference in attitude toward the role of a novelist. Hector Tobar describes in an article for the *Los Angeles Times* the distinct reverence with which *les romanciers* are greeted in France.¹⁵² He claims that “people flip through books here the way people flip through satellite TV channels back home.”¹⁵³ Whether this is entirely true or not, Tobar does point to an important cultural difference. Americans are saddled with a deep distrust for intellectualism, for the ivory tower of academics. For the French, a mastery of culture is more widely sought, or at least sought without the same sort of shame. *Radio France* has multi-part programs on literature and philosophy, where the deepest dive into a book found in American radio comes from a twenty minute interview on *NPR*. Tobar was rightfully surprised by the level admiration with which he and other American

¹⁵² Hector Tobar, “In France, Writers Are like Gods,” *Los Angeles Times* (24 Sept. 2012).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

writers were greeted in France; the kind of admiration which is reserved, in America, for movie stars and pop stars.

This preexisting myth of the author—as a genius to be revered and learned from—which exists in France to a much greater degree than in America, predisposed Baudelaire to be taken in by the persona which Poe created for himself. In this reframing of the dynamic of the creation of the author through translation, it is Poe, not Baudelaire who has the greatest agency. Were Baudelaire and Valéry, then, parodies of the intellectual, too eager to find genius in the mundane, readily reading a deeper meaning into a place where there is none? This is not a fully truthful framing of the dynamic, as Poe took literature seriously. He was an acute and opinionated critic of his contemporaries, and thus was not *only* trying to fool his readers into believing in his romantic vision of himself. Poe was simply all too aware of the role that the myth of the author plays in the reception of any literature. In the desire of critics or theorists to infer something about an author from his work, to *understand*. Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry found perfection in Poe's *œuvre*, because it intentionally offered up perfection in the form a beautifully contrived poem alongside a beautifully contrived philosophy of its composition.¹⁵⁴

It is not just in the case of Poe that the preexisting myth of the author had an undue influence on the way in which the figure of the author was then created through translation. In the case of Faulkner, as well, the deliberate choices of the author aid in the creation of a persistent myth of who the author is, though this time by negation. Faulkner was notoriously tight lipped, refusing to answer questions about himself or his work to the satisfaction of interviewers, as well as being nonchalant about ceding the determination of meaning to his readers.¹⁵⁵ This is almost the exact opposite of how Poe set out to create an authorial persona for

¹⁵⁴ Jill Lepore, "Humbug."

¹⁵⁵ Coindreau, "The Faulkner I Knew," p. 99.

himself, and yet it produced much the same effect. The persona that Poe created of a deeply romantic writer, disconnected from material reality and being accosted by the intense beauty of the world as only an artist can be, matched up with the ideal artist of Baudelaire (he saw what he wanted to see). By contrast, the affected modesty and reservedness of Faulkner—the almost complete *lack* of myth material—just as effectively created an authorial persona particular to Faulkner. This modest genius matched up to Coindreau’s image of the ideal artist just as perfectly as Poe’s belligerent genius matched up with Baudelaire’s.

Barthes tells us in *The Death of the Author* that “The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it.”¹⁵⁶ Additionally, the “Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book.”¹⁵⁷ The book is traditionally believed to be born from the intellect of the author like Athena from Zeus. However, for Barthes the modern author is “born simultaneously with the text,”¹⁵⁸ *from* the text, reversing the relationship. Still, the older conception of the author is favored by critics because “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on a text.”¹⁵⁹ In the case of Poe and Faulkner, the imposition of the myth of an author (an author born from the text) serves, in the instance of their translation, to limit the Americanness of their work. Instead, it allows for a universal—in other words European—interpretation to dominate. Translations as we know them are often limiting. The question must be posed, however, of whether a translation can have no author in the way that a text has no author (at least in Barthes conception). Or is it the case that translations will always be limited interpretations of the original work?

¹⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath (Fontana, 1977) p. 143.

¹⁵⁷ *Idem*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 147.

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